



Language in scientific writing

SchreibCenter at the Language Resource Center

The language in scientific texts can often seem complicated and difficult to understand, but it does not have to be. Here are some ideas to consider when writing your own scientific text – they are based on, and thus influenced by, German standards of scientific writing and may only apply in a German-speaking context:

Be concise and accurate!

- Avoid long, complex sentences. In general, a sentence should contain one main point that can be supported by a subordinate clause. If your sentences go on for several lines or even a whole paragraph, try to revise them to make them shorter and more precise.
- Whenever you introduce a new technical term or key concept to the reader, be sure to provide a definition: How do you use this term in your text?
- Do not use synonyms for technical terms.
- Avoid vague statements such as *quite a lot*, *certain ideas*.

Write complete sentences!

- Do not use half-finished sentences or ellipses. They can be used in journalistic writing, but should be avoided in scientific writing.
- Do not use bullet points. You can present some key elements or main arguments numbered or as bullet points set off from the body of the text, but keep this to a minimum.

Use metaphors wisely!

- Metaphors can be helpful to paint a picture of complex dynamics and concepts. However, use them carefully in a scientific text. While phrases such as *this isn't rocket science* or *the bottom line is...* are vivid expressions, they will be inappropriate in many scientific texts.

Be objective in your writing!

- Avoid giving personal information, making judgments, or using sarcasm or irony.

Avoid trivialities!

- Your text should follow a single story line. If you want to include additional information, footnotes, or endnotes, consider whether the information is necessary.

Be careful about the tense you use!

- Theory and background are usually presented in the present tense (e.g. in the introduction), whereas methods and results are more typically presented in the past tense.